

Sign Language Interpreter Quality in Idaho Schools: A Position Paper

Prepared by the Educational Interpreter Interagency Consortium (EIIC)

Position Statement

According to recent results from the national K-12 assessment tool, 62 percent of Idaho's educational interpreters could not interpret 60 percent of classroom information. Idaho needs minimum standards to guarantee equal access to classroom information.

Background

In 2004, Idaho employed sign language interpreters to serve approximately 90 deaf or hard-of-hearing students throughout its 114 school districts (Idaho State Department of Education, 2004). Beginning in the 1960s, more families began to choose the mainstream environment for their children's education needs; this gained added impetus through the passage of Section 504 of the *Vocational Rehabilitation Act*; PL 94-142, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*; and the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

Among the many factors that influence student success, there is a correlation between the academic achievements of deaf students and the competency of their interpreters (Odyssey, 2002; Schick, 2005; Winston, E., 2004; Ramsey, C., 1997). Despite this clear relationship, many school districts hire individuals who lack necessary skills to effectively interpret.

What is the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment?

A grant from the State Department of Education recently allowed a majority of Idaho K-12 interpreters to receive a nationally recognized skills assessment called the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA).

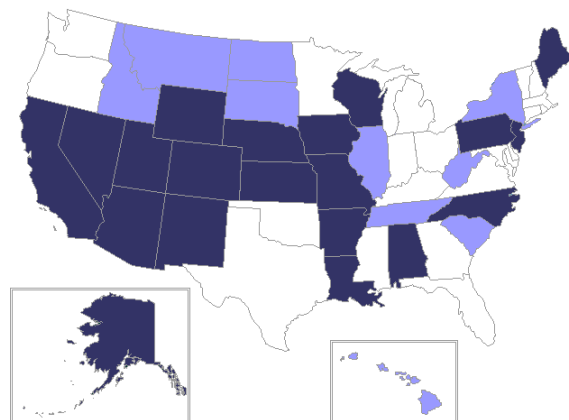


Figure 1. States requiring EIPA for minimum standard (Modified from Schick, 2005).

The EIPA evaluates interpreting skills using a 0-5 Likert Scale, with 5 being the most advanced. Scores from multiple evaluators are averaged to create an overall score (Boys Town National Research Hospital, 2005). As Figure 1 illustrates, 20 states use the EIPA as a minimum standard; an additional 10 states are in the process of adopting the EIPA or use it for evaluation purposes. Table 1 on page 2 shows the minimum scores these 20 states require as a minimum standard and the 10 states that are evaluating the EIPA.

Table 1. Minimum EIPA scores and States Pending (Schick, 2005).

Minimum EIPA Score	States
4.0	Alaska, California, and Nevada
3.5	Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Utah, Wisconsin, and Wyoming
3.0	Kansas
NA	Missouri ¹
States in the process of adopting the EIPA or using it for evaluation purposes	
Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, New York, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, South Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia	

¹ Missouri uses a calculation to align with a quality assurance screening, not psychometrically valid or sanctioned (Schick 2005).

The key issue at hand is the relationship between the EIPA score and the percentage of information being accurately interpreted. Figure 2 below presents the EIPA designer's educational estimates for these relationships in both chart and tabular formats.

In other words, interpreters who score between 3.0 and 3.4 are most likely able to accurately convey only 50-59 percent of the classroom information. Unfortunately, the most important terminology and complex concepts are generally omitted when interpreters struggle to keep up. Insignificant terminology and simple concepts are usually conveyed with little difficulty.

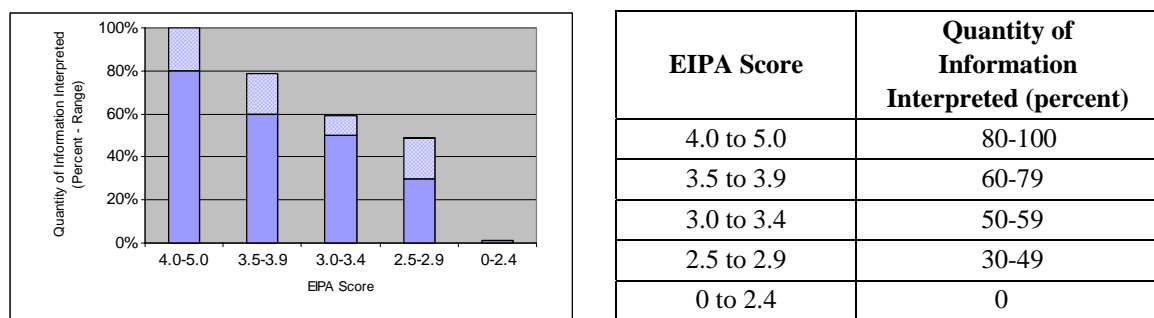


Figure 2. Chart and table presenting the quantity of information interpreted given an individual's EIPA score (Schick 2005).

How did Idaho K-12 Interpreters Perform on the EIPA?

The EIPA test results for Idaho's educational interpreters do not bode well for the deaf and hard-of-hearing student population. As Table 2 shows, over 60 percent of Idaho interpreters were unable to convey 60 percent of classroom information. Moreover, over 40 percent were only able to interpret up to 50 percent of the information presented in the classroom environment. As parents of deaf and hard-of-hearing students become aware of these figures, they will require answers as to why their children are not receiving equal access to education.

Table 2. Summarized results of Idaho educational interpreter EIPA results for each of the five EIPA score bands.

EIPA Score	Quantity of Information Interpreted (percent)	Idaho Interpreter Scores for Each Level
4.0 to 5.0	80-100	13 (19 percent)
3.5 to 3.9	60-79	12 (18 percent)
3.0 to 3.4	50-59	14 (21 percent)
2.5 to 2.9	30-49	11 (16 percent)
0 to 2.4	0	17 (25 percent)

Why did Many Idaho Interpreters Perform Poorly?

While some educational interpreters scored in the 4.0-to-5.0 range, the poor performance among many Idaho interpreters can be attributed to a general lack of training and mentoring. Idaho has multiple training resources available at little cost to interpreters, but these resources have been sorely underutilized.

Additionally, because Idaho K-12 interpreters generally do not receive remuneration for professional development, many do not seek out workshops, mentorships, or self-study programs. Furthermore, recruiting and retaining qualified interpreters is difficult in Idaho because local pay scales are not reflective of the complex nature of interpreting. Combine the nonexistence of a statewide minimum standard with no remuneration for professional development, and one can clearly understand why more than 60 percent of Idaho's K-12 interpreters scored poorly on the EIPA.

What is the Crux of the Issue?

The crux of the issue is the amount of information Idaho's deaf children are entitled to in the classroom. Idaho has no legal minimum standard to ensure the quality of its educational interpreters. Thus, while school districts are required to hire a sign language

interpreter to accommodate a deaf student, they do not always employ an individual who has the skills to adequately convey classroom communication. With laws including *No Child Left Behind* and minimum Idaho Standards Achievement Test requirements, it is essential for districts to employ interpreters who can provide equal communication access to their deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

How Do We Solve this Problem?

The EIIC is working with parents, school administrators, students, interpreters, and state agencies to set a minimum standard into law. The EIIC proposes a legislative enactment with these features:

- All K-12 interpreters employed in the State of Idaho must have an EIPA score of at least 3.5 or hold a nationally recognized certification from the Registry Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) or the National Association of the Deaf.
- Oral and Cued Speech transliterators must hold certification from the RID or TECUnit, respectively.
- All K-12 interpreters employed in the State of Idaho must earn 80 hours (not credits) of continuing education units every 5 years.
- Interpreters will be given a 3-year grace period to meet the minimum standard.
- Graduates holding at least an Associates Degree from an accredited interpreter training program will have 1 year to meet the standard.

Who Will Pay for This?

There are several main statewide sources of funding for training and credentialing currently being utilized:

1. Individual interpreters – interpreters can continue to pay for their own professional development and credentialing as other professionals do. A myriad of free home-study materials are available to interpreters nationwide.
2. School districts – districts that employ interpreters can continue to support their professional development and allow them to attend workshops on inservice days.
3. State Department of Education – the Department can continue to provide grants for interpreter development.
4. Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind – the School can continue to provide grants, staff, and resources for interpreter development.

5. The Council for the Deaf and Hard-of-hearing – the Council can continue to provide in-kind contributions of expertise and resources for interpreter development.
6. Idaho State University – ISU can provide its facilities and distance learning video conferencing network infrastructure for statewide training workshops for a fee.
7. Private institutions – Private firms can provide in-kind contributions of expertise and resources for interpreter development.

After the proposed legislation goes into effect, interpreters seeking employment in the K-12 setting will be responsible for their own credentialing costs prior to working in the State of Idaho, unless they receive emergency authorization. Recent graduates of interpreter training programs will be responsible for their credentialing costs prior to the expiration of their 1-year grace period.

Call to Action

Almost 90% of Idaho's deaf and hard-of-hearing children are mainstreamed. They are expected to meet the same educational standards as their hearing peers. To deprive them of equal access to communication because of insufficient interpretation is unacceptable.

Now is the time to give Idaho's deaf children an equal opportunity to access classroom information. No parent or school district would employ a teacher who could only communicate 50 percent of instructional information in a classroom. With support from all stakeholders in establishing a minimum standard into law, Idaho's deaf children will not be the ones left behind.

The EIIC requests the active support of all stakeholders in establishing this minimum standard in Idaho.

Contacts

JoAnn Shopbell, M.S., CSC, NAD V, SC:L
Chairperson, Idaho Educational Interpreter Interagency Consortium
208-934-4457 or joann.shopbell@isdb.idaho.gov

Wes Maynard, MBA, CI/CT, NIC Master
Executive Director, Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
208-334-0879 or maynardw@idhw.state.id.us